



Miss d'Artagnan By Royal Brown

Nancy Learns Difference Between the Bootlegger and the Hi-jacker.

STANDING beside her car, Nancy glanced about her. "What a duck of a place to develop engine trouble in," she murmured. The surrounding scenery consisted of snow and primeval forest, for she was stalled in the wilds of Maine, or possibly the wilds of Canada. She was not quite sure which.

"This," Nancy assured herself impatiently, "is perfectly preposterous. I can't stay here all night. I'd freeze to death. Why on earth doesn't a car come?" Then, as if the good—or bad—fairly "that had always seen to it that she got what she wanted had summoned it, a car sped toward her. Nancy planted herself in its path.

"Stop!" The snow lashed it, half obscuring its headlights. But its driver must have seen her, for momentarily its speed slackened. Then the engine roared anew and the car, leaping forward, would have run her down had she not sprung swiftly to one side. The habit of caution was as ingrained in Wigglesworth Thayer as his conscience. He had played a very cautious game for end for Harvard—so cautious that he had been chosen for the all-American team two years running. Later he had while flying in France very cautiously disposed of six Boche planes with a minimum risk to himself.

"Caution had advised Wig, when Nancy had tried to stop him, to put his foot on the accelerator and keep it there. But before he had done so, his conscience began to bother him. Suppose somebody really were in distress.

The thought was too much for him. So he snapped off his lights, stopped his engine, and started back. But as the Wig came upon her, her shock was to him and he did not recognize her or even her gender. That was because she had, for this trip to Quebec, garbed herself in breeches and puttees. And in these, with her short coat and close-fitting little hat, she looked like a well, exactly like a slim and adorable girl.

There was no excuse save the snow, the place and the time for her to mistake her for anything else, or to announce his presence as he did.

"Up your hands," he suggested, by way of preliminary. Instead Nancy screamed. She was frightfully ashamed of that immediately.

"Good gracious!" she snapped. "What do you mean by creeping up on me that way? I had no idea there was anybody around. Why don't you blow a horn?"

"Good-lord!" gasped Wig. "It's you!"

"Yes—isn't the world a little small?" she suggested, satirically. "You are supposed to be arriving at Somerville from Boston and I find you on my way to Quebec."

"I'm going to the Somervilles now from Quebec. Didn't Edith tell you?"

"If she had, I should be in Boston, not here."

In fact, it was on the discovery that Wigglesworth was to make one of the party's friend Edith Somerville had invited for the week end in her new country home that Nancy, with chin stubbornly lifted, had headed her car in the direction opposite to that from which the object of her dislike was expected to approach, and had driven boldly into the lowering north.

THEY had never stopped to wonder how they got that way. They belonged to the same set in Boston and they had no more chance of avoiding each other than goldfish in the same bowl.

Nancy gave a cry of criticism. "You had better give me that revolver," she suggested. "You don't look to me like a safe person to have it."

They were off, both running true to form.

"It happens," he retorted stiffly, "to be nothing more deadly than a pipe. I am not in the habit of going armed."

"Really?" I would have thought you wouldn't even venture across the public grounds without a gun. One of the swans might attack you, you know."

But he, relaxing into tight-lipped sneer, had turned to her engine. "You've burned out your bearings," he cried at once, almost as if she had committed murder.

And he felt almost that way. He was fond of engines, as some men are of horses.

"Burned out my bearings?" she echoed. "Why, I told the garage man in Portland to see if I needed oil and to put it in if I did."

"I suggest," he advised, "that in the future you look yourself—and see that the oil is actually put in. It is fairly important, you know—or should."

"Oh—pish!" she retorted. She added, quite as if it were all his fault instead of hers, "What are you going to do about it except talk?"

"Nothing. Except leave your car here and take you along with me until we come to some place where I can drop you."

"How chivalrous! But I'm headed for Quebec, you know."

"And I'm headed the other way. Sorry, but—"

"You were born that way, I suppose," she commented. "Run along, Wigglesworth—I'll wait until somebody gives me a way out."

You probably won't have to wait long. That plan is worthy of the brain that conceived it," he assured her. "The night traffic along this road is heavy."

"Are you trying to be sarcastic?"

"Not at all. The trouble is that you'll have no way of telling whether the car you stop is driven by a bootlegger or a hi-jacker."

"What's a hi-jacker?" interrupted Nancy.

"An estimable gentleman who persuades the bootlegger of the error of his ways—with the assistance of a sawed-off shotgun. And having persuaded him, proceeds to confiscate his cargo and divert it to his own ends."

"You a movie fan?" she inquired, solicitously. "I've heard that the movies affect the young that way."

"Do try to be sensible for once— even if it is an effort," he suggested. "They call this road Alcohol alley. You can't possibly stay here—"

"You'll stay there!" he added grimly. "If I have to tie you. I'm no more enthusiastic about all this than you are, but that goes as it lays. That's all."

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